

Abstract 502

TITLE: A Behavioral Risk Profile of California HIV-Infected Women of Childbearing Age

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BACKGROUND/OBJECTIVES: Studies of childbearing women nationwide and in California suggest that the HIV infection rate is stable or declining among these women (California Department of Health Services, Office of AIDS, 1996). Efforts to further reduce the transmission of HIV from infected pregnant women to their infants (vertical transmission) and the number of AIDS cases among women in general have raised questions about HIV risk factors among childbearing women. The objective of this analysis was to describe the risk factors that put childbearing women at risk for HIV infection. This information is needed to further reduce HIV infections among at-risk childbearing women, and the vertical transmission of HIV.

METHODS: We used data from the State of California for female clients of childbearing years (aged 13-45) who received an HIV test result through publicly funded voluntary testing from July 1995 through June 1997 (n = 189,114). Descriptive statistical analyses were used to develop a demographic and behavioral profile of these women. Analyses were conducted separating first-time and repeat testing clients.

RESULTS: 850 results were HIV positive. The HIV infection rate was similar among first-time and repeat testers (9.4% vs. 0.5%). Pregnant women were much more likely to be infected and those who were repeat testers had almost twice the HIV infection rate when compared to first-time testers (7% vs. 3.7%). African-American women had the highest number and percentage of HIV infections compared to white and Latina women (37% vs. 32% and 25%). African-American first-time testers described their HIV risks of injection drug use, exchanging sex for drugs/money, and being a partner of multiple partners as higher than white and Latina first-time testers.

CONCLUSIONS: HIV prevention could be more efficient and effective by targeting only women of childbearing age at highest risk for HIV infection.

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